OUR FRIEND *The* DOG

by MAURICE MAETERLINCK

FRIENDS
OF ACPL

Retold for

CHILDREN

by JOHN MARTIN

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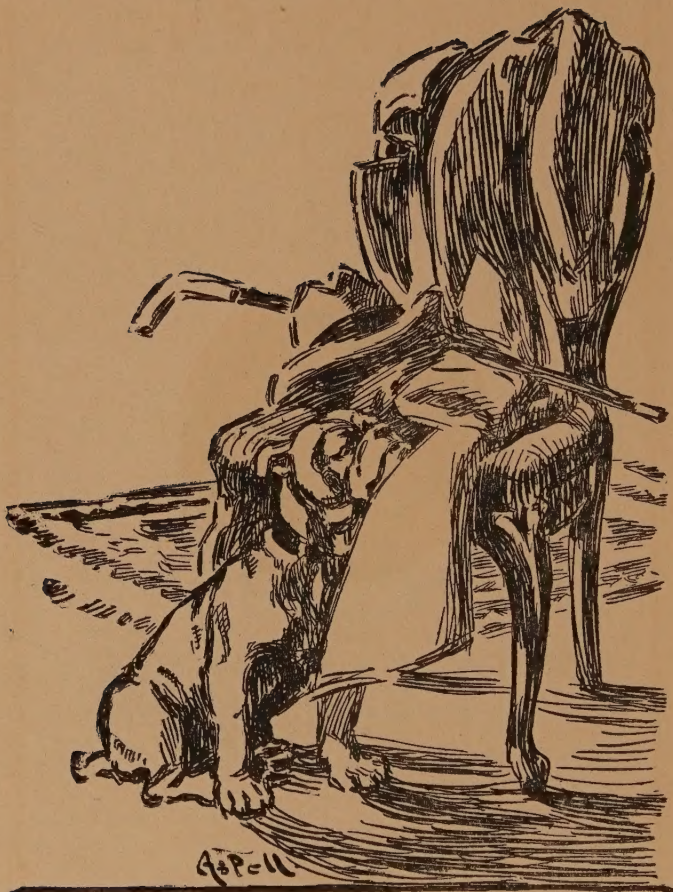
OUR FRIEND THE DOG



He is joyously our close and adoring slave, whom nothing discourages, nothing drives away,—

OUR FRIEND
the
DOG
by
Maurice Maeterlinck

Adapted for
CHILDREN
by
JOHN MARTIN
Illustrated by
SEDDIE ASPELL

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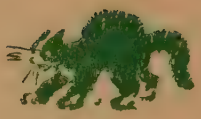

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A FOREWORD *to our* CHILDREN

CHILDREN, of all the many kinds of literary work I have done for you, the retelling of the story of *Our Friend the Dog* has given me the most happiness. I suppose this is so because, while really wanting to give you something that would add to your joy and pleasant memories, I have been living very close to the life of *The Dog,* our natural companion and loving friend. I thought I *knew* dogs as well as any one and understood them more than most people; but after studying and working with Maurice Maeterlinck's essay about our dog friends, I have decided I knew but little. No one among writers and lovers of dumb creatures has looked so deeply and seen so clearly into the very being and meaning of this animal friend whose life and purpose of living is so closely linked with ours.

Among all of Maeterlinck's splendid essays, none is so glowing with beauty and simplicity as his tribute to *Our Friend the Dog.*

I wanted you children to have this essay for your very own, and I wished it to hold as much as possible of the original beauty and understanding. In retelling it for you I have taken few liberties that would deprive you of the happiness and benefit of Maeterlinck's own story. When I had changed certain words that could well be simpler, and shortened some sentences and, last of all, rearranged some interesting but difficult philosophies, I left you the delightful *heart* of the essay. One day, when you read the original English translation so beautifully done by Alexander de Mattos, you will feel that it was but a short step from the grown-up essay to this, your own, which I give to you with pride and love.

So, children, let this story of *Our Friend the Dog* go straight to loving places in your young hearts, and let it be an influence that shall give to your advancing lives more true reasons for loving, understanding, and protecting our faithful and unselfish friend *The Dog*.

JOHN MARTIN

OUR FRIEND THE DOG

WITHIN the last few days I have lost a little bulldog. He had just completed the sixth month of his brief life. He had no history. His intelligent eyes opened to look out upon the world to love all children and all grown-ups. Then his eyes closed for all time. The friend who had passed him on to me had given him the startling name of Pelleas. But why rechristen him—for how could a poor little dog, loving, devoted, and faithful, disgrace any name of man or hero?

Pelleas had a great, bulging, powerful forehead, like that of Socrates. Under a little black nose, blunt as a mallet, there hung a pair of large, evenly formed chops, which made his head a sort of big, obstinate, pensive, and three-cornered warning. He was beautiful after the manner of a beautiful, natural monster that had obeyed the laws of its kind. And what a smile of attentive obligingness, of innocence, of affectionate submission, of boundless gratitude! What a loving smile lit up that adorable mask of ugliness at the least caress! Whence did that smile come? From the soft and melting eyes? From the ears pricked up to catch the words of man? From the forehead that unwrinkled to understand and love, or from the stump of a tail that wriggled at the other end of him to prove the glowing joy that filled his body? Oh, that tail, what an indicator of all emotions!

How happy was he once more to feel the hand or catch the glance of the god to whom he had surrendered himself, for indeed his master was godlike.

Pelleas was born in Paris, and I had taken him to the country. His bonny, fat paws, shapeless and loose-going, carried him through unexplored pathways of his new place of living. His huge, serious head, flat-nosed and sad, looked as if heavy with thought. For this strange head was beginning the great work that oppresses every brain at the start of life. In less than five or six weeks he had to get into his mind satisfactory ideas of the universe.

We children of man, aided by all the knowledge of our elders and brothers, take thirty or forty years to outline some little idea of all that life expects of us. The humble dog has to solve this mystery for himself in a few days. Yet, in the eyes of God who knows all

things, does not his humbly gained wisdom have the same weight and the same value as our own?

All ground, then, that may be scratched and dug up, must be studied—beautiful, brown earth which sometimes shows surprising things. You need give but a careless look at the sky—it is not interesting, for it gives nothing to eat; one glance does away with it for good and all. Then the grass must be discovered—the fine and green grass, the springy and cool grass, a glorious field for races and sports; a friendly and boundless bed, in which lies hidden the good and wholesome couch-grass.

It is a question, also, of making a thousand pressing and curious observations. For instance, it is necessary, with no other guide than pain, to learn to calculate the height of things from the top of which you can jump into space. You must soon learn that it is foolish to pursue birds who fly away, and that you cannot climb trees after the cats who defy you there. You must know the

difference between the sunny spots where it is delicious to sleep and the patches of shade in which you shiver.

With stupid wonder you mark that rain does not fall inside the house; that water is cold, no place to live in, and dangerous; while fire is kind and good at a distance, but terrible when you come too near it. You observe that the meadows, the farmyards, and sometimes the roads, are haunted by giant creatures with threatening horns. They are great, good-natured creatures, perhaps; at any rate, silent creatures who allow you to sniff at them a little curiously without taking offence, but who keep their real thoughts to themselves.

It is necessary to learn, after painful and humiliating experience, that all laws of nature may not be obeyed without heed in the dwelling of the lord and master. Oh, place of wonder, this dwelling of the master! Then, you must understand that the kitchen is the most favored and agreeable spot in that sacred

dwelling, although you are hardly allowed to settle in it because of the cook, who is a great but jealous power.

You are to learn that doors are important but fickle tyrants. They sometimes lead to great joy, but are most often tightly closed, mute and stern, haughty and heartless. They remain deaf to all your entreaties.

You acknowledge, once and for all, that the most necessary good things of life and the very certain blessings are generally locked up in stew-pans and pots, and that these are almost always impossible to get into. You learn how to look at them with seeming indifference, and you practise taking no notice of them.

You say to yourself that here are things which must be sacred, since merely to skim them with the tip of a respectful little tongue is enough to let loose the terrible anger of all the gods in the house.

Then, what is one to think

of the table on which so many things happen that cannot be guessed; of the scornful chairs on which one is forbidden to sleep; of the plates and dishes that are empty by the time one can get at them; of that mysterious object, the lamp, that drives away the dark?

How many orders, dangers, forbidden things, problems and puzzles one has to arrange in a sadly overburdened memory! . . . And how to settle all these with other laws and puzzles more powerful within oneself—within one's instinct?

For instance—to give only one example—when the hour of sleep has come for men, you retire to your hole surrounded by darkness and the great solitude of night. All is sleep in the master's house. You feel yourself very small and weak in the presence of the mystery of darkness. You know that the gloom is filled with foes who hover and lie in wait. You suspect the trees, the

passing wind, and the moon-beams. You would like to hide, or make yourself nothing by holding your breath. But still the watch must be kept; you must, at the least sound, come from your retreat and face the invisible danger. You must bluntly disturb the silence of the earth, at the risk of bringing down upon yourself alone one or many whispering evils. Whoever the enemy may be—even if he be man, the very brother of the master whom it is your business to defend—you must attack blindly, fly at his throat. You must even take no notice of a hand and voice like those of your master. You will not be silent, never attempt to escape, never allow yourself to be tempted or bribed. A very small creature lost in the great night without help, you must continue the heroic alarm to your last breath.

This is all the great ancestral duty, the absolute duty stronger than death, and not even man's will and anger are able to check it. And when, in man's safer dwelling-places of to-day, the dog is pun-

ished for his untimely zeal, he looks at us in astonished reproach as though to tell us that we are wrong. We have lost sight of the greatest part of the treaty which he made with us at the time when we lived in caves, forests, and fens. But the dog remains faithful to his treaty in spite of all, and thus he keeps closer to the truth of life, which is full of snares and hostile forces if love and faith are forbidden.

But how much care and study are needed to succeed in fulfilling this duty! How tangled it has become since the days of silent caverns and great deserted lakes! It was all so simple then, so easy and so clear. The lonely cave home opened upon the side of a hill. All that came near, or that moved on the horizon of the plains or woods, was without question the enemy . . . But to-day, you can no longer tell . . . You have to acquaint yourself with a way of living which you do nct believe in, all the while seeming to understand a thousand confusing cus-

It becomes necessary, therefore, first of all to know exactly where the master's sacred kingdom begins and ends.

toms and things. Thus, it seems plain that, after all, the whole world is not the property of the master, but a place of unknown borders and unknown masters.

It becomes necessary, therefore, first of all to know exactly where the master's sacred kingdom begins and ends. To whom may we allow admittance, whom are we to stop?

There is the road by which every one, even the shabby poor, has the right to pass. Why? You do not know. It is a fact which you deeply regret, but which you are bound to accept.

After all, what matters it? You are sleeping peacefully in a ray of the sun that covers the threshold of the kitchen with pearls. The earthenware pots are amusing themselves by elbowing and nudging one another on the edge of the shelves trimmed with paper lace-work. The copper stew-pans play at scattering spots of light over the smooth, white

walls. The motherly stove hums a soft tune and dandles three merrily dancing saucepans. The clock, bored in its old case, strikes the noble hour of meal time. The clever flies tease your ears.

On the glittering table lie a chicken, a hare, three partridges, besides other things which are called fruits, and which are good for nothing. The cook cleans a big silver fish and throws the scraps (instead of giving them to you!) into the dust bin! Ah, the dust bin! Endless treasury of wonderful windfalls—the jewel of the house!

You shall have your share, a delicious and secretly taken share; but it does not do to seem to know where it is. You

are strictly forbidden to rummage in the dust-bin. Man in this way forbids many pleasant things, but life would be dull and empty indeed if you had to obey all the orders of the pantry, the cellar, and the dining-room. Luckily, man

is absent-minded and does not long remember the instructions which he so freely gives. He is easily deceived. You gain your ends and do as you please if you have the patience to await the hour.

You are subject to man, and he is the one god; but you none the less have your own calm ideas of right and wrong. You feel that forbidden acts become lawful if they are carried out without the master's knowledge. So, let us close the watchful eye that has *seen*. Let us pretend to sleep and dream of the moon!

Hark! A gentle tapping at the window that looks out on the garden!

HARK! A gentle tapping at the window that looks out on the garden! What is it? Nothing! Only a bough of hawthorn that has come to see what we are doing in the kitchen. Trees are very curious and often excitable, but they do not count. One has nothing to say to them; they are not reliable—they obey the wind which has no character. But what is that? I hear steps! Up, ears open! Nose on the alert! It is the baker coming to the kitchen, while the postman is opening a little gate in

the hedge-row. They are friends; they bring something, it is well. You can greet them and prudently wag your tail twice or thrice, with an indulgent smile.

Another alarm! What is it now? A carriage pulls up in front of the steps. This is a difficult problem. Before all, it is of much importance to heap many insults on the horses—great, proud beasts, who make no reply. Meantime, out of the corner of your eye, you examine the persons stepping from the carriage. They are well-clad and seem to feel their right to be here. They are probably going to sit at the table of the gods. The proper thing is to bark without bitterness and with a shade of respect—to show that you are doing your duty, but that you are doing it with cautious intelligence. Nevertheless, you hold a lingering suspicion and, behind the guests' backs, you stealthily and persistently sniff the air in a very knowing way. You

must be sure that these persons have no hidden intentions of evil-doing.

But halting footsteps resound outside the kitchen. It is the poor man dragging his crutch. This is an enemy of ancient memories, the direct descendant of him who roamed outside the cave-dwelling which you suddenly see again as if it were yesterday. You are wild with indignation, your bark is broken, your teeth are multiplied with hatred and rage. You are about to seize the enemy by the breeches when the cook, armed with her broom, comes to protect the traitor. You go back to your hole where, with eyes filled with helpless and slanting flames, you growl out frightful but useless threats. You think within yourself that this is the end of all things, and that the human species has lost all notion of justice—and injustice.

Is that all? Not yet; for the smallest life is made up of countless duties. It is a long

work for you to plan and shape a happy and safe course upon the borderland of two such different worlds as the world of beasts and the world of men.

But, reasonably soon, you know fairly well what to do and how to behave on the master's premises. Still, the world does not end at the house door. Beyond the walls and past the hedge there are great spaces over which one has no custody. Here you are no longer at home, and all things are changed. How are we to stand in the street, in the fields, in the market-place, in the shops? After many difficult and delicate observations, we understand that we must take no notice of passers-by; we must obey no calls but the master's; and always we must be polite, with quiet indifference to strangers who pet us. Next, we must earnestly fulfil certain mysterious courtesies toward our brothers, the other dogs. We must respect chickens and ducks. At the bakeshop, we must not appear to notice the cakes, which spread them-

selves insultingly within reach of the tongue. We must not fail to show silent contempt to cats on the steps of houses, who provoke us by hideous grimaces.

You must remember that it is lawful and even praiseworthy to chase and strangle mice, rats, and all animals (we learn to know them by secret marks) that have not yet made their peace with mankind.

* * *

All this and much more! Was it surprising that my little dog, Pelleas, often appeared pensive before the numberless duties and problems? Was it surprising that his humble and gentle look was frequently very grave when laden with cares and full of questions he could not answer?

Alas, he did not have time to finish the long and heavy task which nature lays upon little dog instincts that strive to come nearer the glorious region of the master's manner of living. A mysterious ill took my Pelleas and put an end to

his destiny and adventurous education.

And now, all those efforts to gain a little more light, all that eagerness in loving, and all that courage in one little dog, are removed. That affectionate gaiety and innocent fawning are mine no more. Those kind and devoted looks which turned to man for understanding and love have passed into memory. All those flickering gleams of a distant past in a world no longer ours, and all those nearly human little habits lie under a flowering elder-tree in the corner of my garden.

* * *

Children, I have given you the short life history of Pelleas; that is, he seems to have told his own humble story from a dog's personal point of view. This being finished, is it not fitting that I should speak of the dog from our human outlook?

Man loves the dog, but how much more ought he to love

it when he knows what the dog has accomplished to earn justly the reward of that love!

He is the only living creature who has succeeded in breaking through nature's rigid partitions which separate the species! We human beings are alone, absolutely alone, on this planet. Amid all the forms of life that surround us, not one, excepting the dog, has made an alliance with us. Many creatures fear us, most are unaware of us, and none unselfishly love us.

In the world of plants we have dumb and unmoving slaves, serving in spite of themselves. They merely endure our laws and demands. When free from us and our requirements, they hasten to return to their former wild liberty. The rose or the corn, if they had wings, would fly at our approach like birds.

Of all the myriad things that live and breathe, not one has striven to leap from one

When did the dog first seek man?

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species to another. One animal alone upon the earth has escaped from itself to come bounding toward us.

This animal, our good familiar dog, in drawing away from his world and nearer to man's, has performed one of the most unusual acts that we can find in the history of life. When did the dog first seek man? Or did our ancient man ancestors seek out the poodle, the collie, the mastiff among the wolves and jackals? Or did our friend, the dog, come to us without reason or cause? We cannot tell. As far as man's records stretch, he has been at our side as he is now. He is there in our houses, as ancient, as rightly placed, as perfectly fitting our habits and customs as though he appeared on the earth at the same time as ourselves.

We do not have to gain his confidence or his friendship. He is born our friend; before his eyes are open he believes in us and has given himself to man.

But the word "friend" does not entirely picture his affectionate worship. He

He has surrendered himself body and soul without question.

loves us and reveres us as though we had drawn him out of nothing into the joy of all life. He is, above all, *ours*, full of gratitude and more devoted than the apple of our eye. He is joyously our close and adoring slave, whom nothing discourages, nothing drives away, and whose ardent love and trust nothing can diminish in value.

The dog, loyally and for all time, knows that man is his superior, and has surrendered himself body and soul without question and with no intention of going back. He keeps for himself only his character and those instincts necessary to continue the life nature has ordered for him. With unquestioning and simple faith, he deserts without scruple, for our benefit, the whole animal kingdom to which he belongs. For us he denies his race, his kin, and even his young.

He loves us not only with his heart and intelligence; but down in the deepest instincts of his race, he thinks only of us

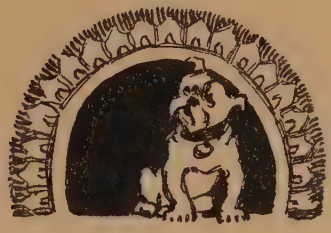
and dreams only of being of use to us. To serve us better, to make himself more suitable for our different needs, he takes on new shapes and abilities which he freely gives to us.

Is he to aid us in the pursuit of game on the plains? Then his legs lengthen, his muzzle tapers, his lungs widen, and he becomes swifter than the deer. Does our prey hide in the undergrowth? Then, this changing genius, knowing our need, gives us the basset—so short-legged that he is almost a footless serpent, which may wind and slip into the closest thickets. Do we ask that he should drive our flocks? The same willing genius gives him size, intelligence, energy, and vigilance. Do we intend him to watch and defend our home? Then his head becomes round and monstrous, in order that his jaws may be more powerful, more formidable and more vicelike. Are we taking him to hot countries? Then his

hair grows shorter and lighter, so that he may faithfully follow us under the rays of a burning sun. Are we going to the north? His feet grow larger, the better to tread the snow; his fur thickens so that the cold shall not compel him to abandon us. Is he intended only for us to play with, to amuse, or to adorn and enliven the home? He clothes himself with royal grace and elegance; makes himself smaller than a doll to sleep on our knees by the fireside; or, he even consents, should our whims demand it, to appear a little ridiculous just to please us.

You will not find in nature's great work a single living being that has been so yielding, with so many forms, or with the same enormous power of shaping itself to meet man's changing desires and needs. This is because there is not one creature in nature's many species that ever gives a thought to the presence of man.

It will be said, maybe, that we have been able to change, almost as greatly, other of our domestic animals: our hens, our pigeons, our ducks, our cats, our horses, or our rabbits. Yes, perhaps; but such changes or transformations do not compare with those of our dog. In any case, we children and grown ones do not feel that along with these changes has come the same unfailing and complete good will, or the same wise and completely given love. We cannot believe that our friend, the dog, comes to bless us by his love and devotion through an accident of nature's laws. So we must take him as he is given to us, and cling to our beliefs because of what we see. And it is sweet to feel that the dog's past history and present way of living proves that he loves us before all else in life.



It was thus that the other day, before his illness, I saw my little Pelleas sitting at the foot of my writing-table, his tail tucked beneath him, his head cocked a little to one side, the better to question me. He was as attentive and tranquil as a saint in his quiet niche. He was happy with the happiness which we, perhaps, may never know, since it sprang from the pure joy he had in my smile and approval—the approval of the master whose life was beyond compare higher than his own. He was there, studying, drinking in all my looks; and he replied gravely, as equal to equal, to my silent understanding of him. He told me, no doubt, that *he* knew that *I* knew he was saying to me all that love should say.

As I saw him thus, so young and full of loving trust, he carried my spirit back through the depth of ages loving me then as now. I almost envied his certainty of love for me, and the joy in his own loving. I said to myself that the dog that meets a good master is a truly happy being. And for children and grown-ups, the selfless devotion of a dog is a very true example of a great love.

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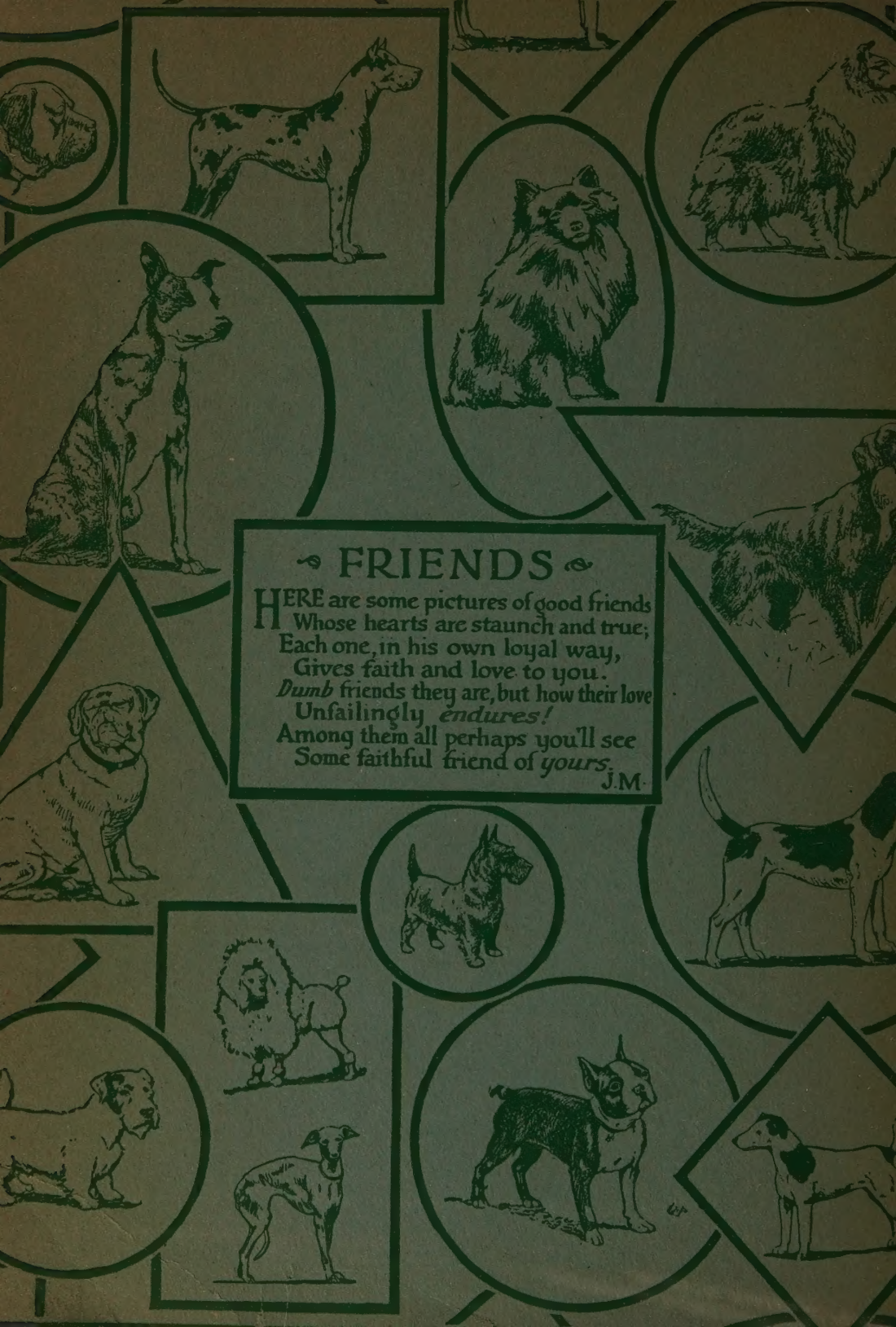
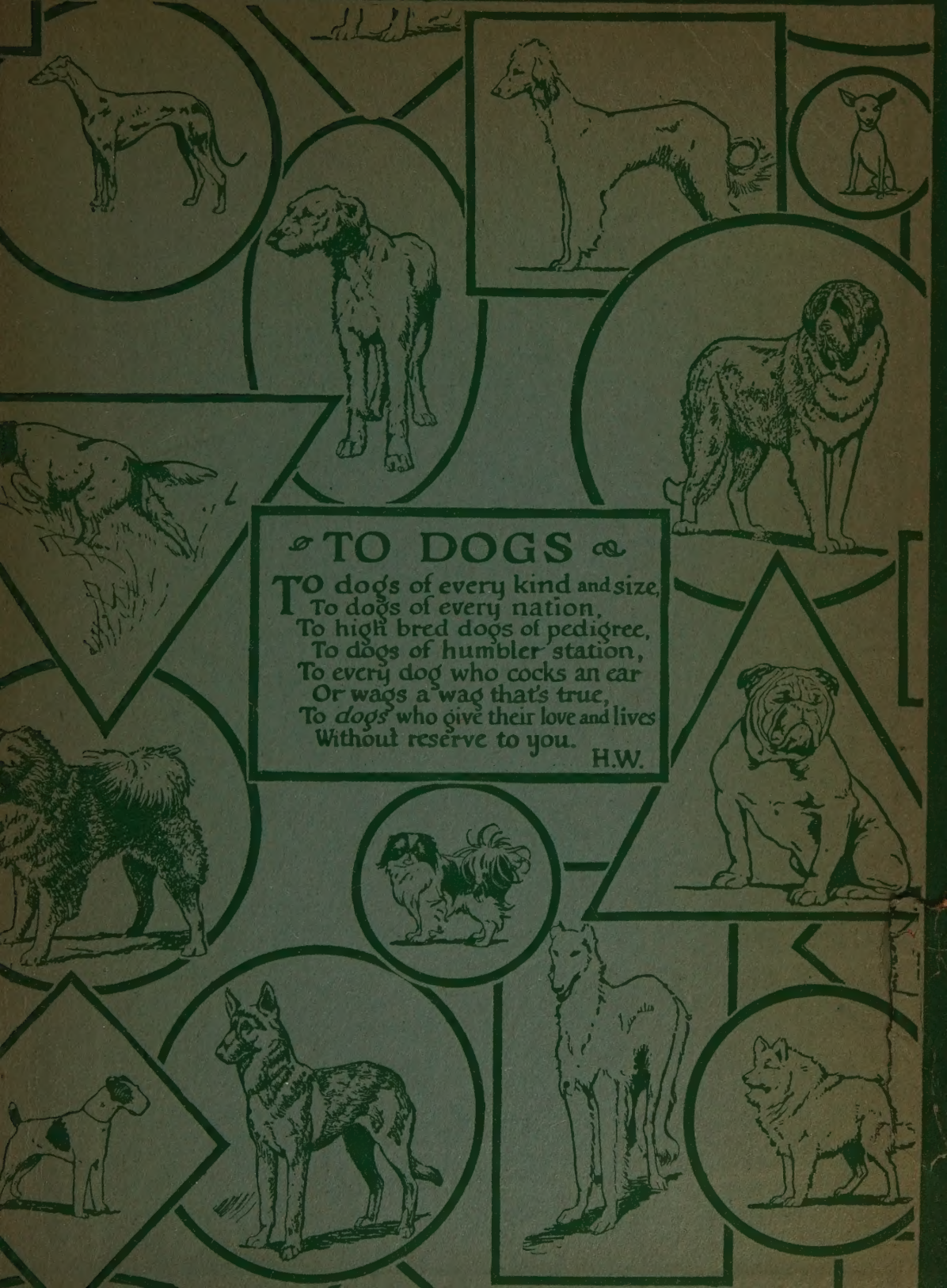


FRIENDS

HERE are some pictures of good friends
Whose hearts are staunch and true;
Each one, in his own loyal way,
Gives faith and love to you.
Dumb friends they are, but how their love
Unfailingly *endures!*
Among them all perhaps you'll see
Some faithful friend of *yours.*

J.M.



TO DOGS

TO dogs of every kind and size,
To dogs of every nation,
To high bred dogs of pedigree,
To dogs of humbler station,
To every dog who cocks an ear
Or wags a wag that's true,
To *dogs* who give their love and lives
Without reserve to you.

H.W.

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